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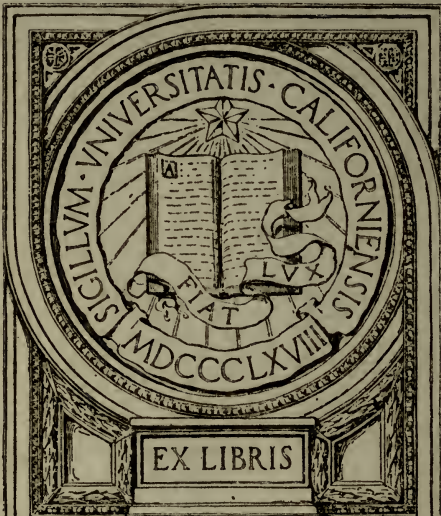
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THE FIVE TOPICS
OF OUR PASTORAL TIME

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FROM THE ISLES

A SERIES OF SONGS

OUT OF GREECE

BY

ARTHUR DAVISON FICKE

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TO MAURICE BROWNE

380662

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THE DREAM HARBOR



WINDS of the South from the sunny beaches
Under the headland call to me ;
And I am sick for the purple reaches,
Olive-fringed, by an idle sea,

Where low waves of the South are calling
Out of the silent sapphire bay,
And slow tides are rising, falling,
Under the cliffs where the ripples play.

Odours of vineyard and grove come thronging
In through my casement open wide ;
And I would follow the dull sweet longing
Unto the slope of the warm hillside.

And I would sit in the low-hung arbor,
Letting the hours go drifting by,
Watching the boats in the little harbor,
Watching the changeless purple sky.

And I would think of the happy chorus
Sung by men in the ancient days,
When they could muse—"There is life before us,
Love, and dreams, which the Gods may praise.

“And let each as his nearest duty
Seek for the dream that shall be most sweet,
Weaving it into a song of beauty,—
Lifting it up to the high Gods’ feet.”

THE SPRINGS OF PARNASSUS



THROUGH cloven cliff and cold ravine,
Through grasses, stealing on unseen,
Beneath the olives’ silvery green
Lightly they wander down
From high Parnassus’ slopes of snow
Unto the vineyard-vales below
And sing strange music as they go
Past many a hillside town.

And might my dreams thus lightly run!—
Through tarns of mist and fields of sun,
Wandering free till their course be done
And lightly straying down;
Lingering sweetly by the way,
Wreathing each crag in silver spray,
And loving with what love I may
Each little hillside town.

DEMETER



HAVE sought her in the starlight,
In the sun and sobbing rain.
Inland valleys, woodland covert,
Ruined yellow harvest plain,

Bleak shore-reaches,—all are empty.

And I turn to search again.

She was more than light that kindles
Morning flame on forest dun.

At her tread the woodland flushes
Into flower, and each one
Of the little streams rejoices
In the Spring that has begun.

I have sought her where the swallow
In its journeys never flies ;
Wastes that touch the world's far ending
Where the daylight palely dies.
I have sought her for her kisses
And the light that fills her eyes.

I am old as are the Seasons
That must follow at my call.
Winter crowned with withered ivy,
Crimson Summer, purple Fall,—
All are mine save one,—one only,
That is dearest of them all.

Wise am I in ancient magic,
But I cannot lead the Spring,
Bid the earth rise up in flowers,
Call the nightingales to sing,
Touch the secret living pulses
That they wake in murmuring.

Age is wise ; yet one thing passes
When the years have sunk and set :—
Secrets burning in youth's bosom,
Thoughts that make youth's eyelids wet,
Greater stirrings, deeper longings,
Things the old must needs forget.

Them she knew as none has known them ;
She was of them, they of her.
Every light on moonlit water,
Every murmurous forest stir
Thrilled about her eyes and eyelids
With the joy and love of her.

I have sought her in the starlight,
In the sun and sobbing rain.
Inland valley, woodland covert,
Ruined yellow harvest plain,
Bleak shore-reaches,—all are empty.
And I turn to search again.

DIONYSUS



WHY are thy lips narcissus-pale ?

Why dost thou bend thy wreathèd head ?

Is it because thy nymphs have fled

And thy processions left the vale ?

Hast thou forgot thine earlier days

When thou didst play as on a lyre

Music in men of heart's desire

And led them up thy sacred ways ?

For thou hast left thine ancient field

And the hill-vineyards of thy birth.

The husbandman from his rocky earth

Still coaxes the slow sparing yield ;

But from the grape thy blood is gone

And gone thy sunrise-breathing fire,

As if, outworn with thy desire,

Despairing thou hadst heavenward flown.

Is it because thou hast been led

Into the walled gates of the town,

Where brawling revelers would drown

Thy tears in wine . . . till thou hast fled

Back to thy soil to come no more,

And in the vine no more suspire

That ecstasy of mounting fire

That once thy singers' foreheads wore ?

Once were thine eyes bright with the sun,
Thy lips kissed rapture to the vine
That bloomed therewith.—Oh thou divine
Light of the Gods, thy orison
Men have forgot, and in their eyes
Thou art become a common thing,
Rudely to rout,—or else to fling
Into the street, as do the wise.

Yea, they are wise. But as I drain
The cup where sweetness lingers, yet,
I think that something they forget
Who from thy solving touch refrain :—
Some song the Spring-pale vineleaves sung,
Some faded pomp of Autumn fire
That wakes the heart's low secret lyre,
Remembering when the world was young.

And here tonight, amid these flowers,
Where in the moonlight no buds stir,
I, thy lone lingering worshipper,
Feel drifting past those faded hours
When in the moonlit hills of Thrace
Men knew thine ivy and thy fire,
And lifted up by great desire
Beheld thy yearning summer face.

CYTHEREA

A MELODY



HE has gone and none may find Her,
Her, who once was all our dreaming ;
She is gone and none may find Her,
Who has filled with light our days.

Was the light too fair to westward ? Has She sped
where rise the gleaming
Sunset-mountains, fiery streaming ? . . .
She is gone ; we may not find Her
In these ways.

Three there are of the Immortals
Who but touch with passing fingers ;
One there is of the Immortals
Who on earth is never seen.
She was not of them ; among us She was one who
dwells and lingers,
Loved and lover of the singers.
Must we give to the Immortals
What has been ?

Spring has oft the valleys brightened
With a false and fleeting glimmer.
Dreams have oft our bosoms lightened
With a gladness too-soon flown.
But when She goes, goes the sunlight, and the days
of life are dimmer ;
Every shadow couches grimmer.—
And what in the heart has brightened
Then is gone.

THE ELDER GODS



HERE Peneus' torrent flows
Down past Tempe to the sea,—
From the great twelve-crested snows
Of Olympus may there be
Still some breath of Gods undying
Following where the Spring is flying
Flushed with white-foot bloom and crying
To the hills to wake ?
May some godlike eyes be turning
Down to where the world is burning
Into blossom, glad and yearning
For the Spring's sweet sake ?

By the leaping foamy river
Which high lips have sung,
Trailing plane trees bud and quiver
As a lyre strung

To the touch of music holy,
Not quite freed from melancholy,
And not heard of ear, but wholly
Felt in breath and stir ;
As on hills at night some feeling
Of faint music lifts the wheeling
Moon through heaven, and a stealing
Dream drifts over her.

Nay, upon their heights the Gods
Shall not die till this is dead.
Time ends not their periods
While the yearly flush is shed
Over Tempe's vine-grown places.
Though they come with forms and faces
Changed, yet never change erases
Aught save fleeting name.
Men may cease their ways to follow
But the nightingale and swallow
Singing, winging through green hollow
Know them still the same.

THE ANCIENT LEGEND



KNOW it all is true ; for I have seen
The light upon the Aegean's purple waves ;
And I have heard the silence of the caves
Where wreathed sarcophagi in darkness lean ;
And I have smelt the breath that from the green
Slopes of Hymettus all my sense enslaves ;
And in Dodona's whispering forest-naves
Felt the dim Presences that hold demesne.
And now I know 'tis more than an old song
Wrought by a poet of his sweet desire.
For Pan still wanders the slow stream along ;
Bacchantes leap round every midnight fire ;
And from the hills where sunset shadows throng
Steals the low music of a vanished lyre.

LETHE AND MNEMOSYNE



ON the Theban plain they run
Evenly side by side.
But the space that stretches from moon to sun
Is not so wide.

He came on Lethe sleeping
And a voice bade him drink
And leave all outworn woe and weeping
On the still brink.

But from the slow stream turning
A voice called longingly
Out of his unstilled ancient yearning—
Mnemosyne.

FOAM AROUND DELOS



SMALL bitter islands set amid the seas ;
Bare headlands hewn of granite harsh and gray
Along whose rocky slopes the salt wind frees
Its fury, and about whose feet the spray
Stands white, and roars before each little bay ;
And hills whose strength is as the strength of these ;—

Yea, it would seem, by some prodigious birth
These isles were soul and body of the waves.
Like billows turned to stone their lifted earth,
Like hollows of the brine their salt sea-caves.
And like the furious sea this front that braves
The ocean's madness and the thunder's mirth.

What iron laugh would echo in these isles
If I should tell them poet's lips have sung
Romance upon them of enchanting smiles,
Corsairs and maidens, dauntless, fair and young ;
And that their beauties once held place among
The love-lute and the lover's tender wiles !

But I have come and loved for no false bloom
Of sickly perfume that must clasp and twine.
But rather that these empty seas give room
For the wide clamor of the struggling brine,
Where men have drunk its perils like a wine
And wrought with strength against it and their doom.

For here is waged the grim perpetual strife
Against the sea, since first the Greeks of old
Made servants of its passions fierce and rife,
Using its very fury with the bold
Resistance against mastery, where is told
The tale of will and effort, which is life.

Untameable and fetterless and free
Flash the dark waters still their storm-spires pale.
As might has been, their might shall ever be ;
And the shore mourns her loss with many a wail.
Yet trembling,—and triumphant,—shall avail
Man's hand upon the fierce throat of the sea.

What little foothold circled with the flood
Has been his fortress ! In the white-walled town
Stretched low along the harbor he has stood,
Where hillside vineyards to the shore come down,—
Green vines, and olives, silver-gray and brown,
Like blossoms of the island's meager blood ;

And heard the calling wind sweep over him,
And felt the intense strong sweetness of the foam ;
And marveled where the sunset red and dim
Burned low along the west, where waves that roam
Lift here and there a sharp crest on the rim
Of sea and sky ; and turned and sought his home ;

Till when, at cold flush of the morning light,
He loosens sail and sees the rent waves strain,
Fulfilled with all their strength and their delight
In struggle, though the guerdon shall be vain,—
Fares forth to seek, and in the end to gain,
The final calm of stardrift and the night. . . .

FROM THE ISLES

TO CHANDLER POST



WHEN days grow old

I do not think, dreaming, we shall forget
The sting of spray that made our foreheads wet,
Nor quite lose memory of the strong sweet cold
Kiss of the winds that through those islands fret
With fume and fury, nor those nights that set
Their stars upon the headlands gray or gold
As day grew old.

All else being past
Save only dreaming of what once has been,
We still shall see the fierce metallic sheen
On strange Aegean seas where the waves drive fast
And waters rise in whirling mounds of green,
And o'er the flying foam our eyes shall lean
Out towards the iron clanging of the blast
All else being past.

Let the fires leap high
Upon each cliff as the night claims its own.
Like stars above the midnight waters sown
Our hopes have known no limit save the sky.
And even as then our mounting dreams have flown
Past shore, past harbor, where wild spray was blown,
So in the hour when hope and dream must die
Let the fires leap high.

For what have we
To do with old age drowsing by the fire ?
Our hearts were lit with the storm-light of desire
And we have felt the passion of the sea
Beat over us with pulse not born to tire.
And after that, what flood shall lift us higher ?
Nay, we would barter all the peace to be
For what have we.

Death's numbing power,—
How shall it bind the strong wings of the soul
Which hath drunk life where Delos' dark waves roll
And seen the Aegean sea break forth in flower ?
The surge and beat of strength past all control,
The windy sweep toward its own unwhispered goal
Shall rise and rend in the ultimate dim hour
Death's numbing power.

And on the sea
The passion of our spirits shall be poured.
Yea, we shall mingle, we shall be as lord
Over the whirling waves that break and flee.
Mixed with the wind's will as we fain had soared,
Filled with the tempest as when once it roared ;
And on the land its thunder's might shall be
And on the sea.

IN THESSALY



AND Pan is gone ! Although we cry
There is no piping voice to make
Glad answer from the river-brake ;
No thundering hoof-beats give reply
To us who linger for his sake
Along the vales of Thessaly.

Gone, and he never may return,—
Strange, half-pathetic earlier god,
Sprung from the mossy forest sod,
Or from those earth-born dreams that burn
In simple hearts on whom the rod
Of life smote hard that they might learn

The bitter struggle from the clay
Up to some unguessed height of man.
While love of free wild things that ran
Glad in the woods at peep of day
Yearned out, and made,—and doomed thee, Pan,
From thy very birth to fade away,

And mingle with thy forest shades
As men grew sadder and more wise.
Forever gone from mortal eyes ;
For as they look above thy glades
To stars that hold their destinies
The glamour fades, thy glamour fades.

SONG GODS



WE are as old as the world
That remembers not its birth.
Our tears are the high gods' weeping,
Our songs are the great gods' mirth.
Our desire the desire of the foam flakes whirled,
And our souls as the souls of earth.

The gods and the earth and the foam
Fulfilled of the world's dim powers
Are stirred with a sweet unrest,
That haunts through the woven hours
Till at last they break into flowers blown,
And of all, we are the flowers.

And when the night shall come
Endless on sea and land,
We shall stand up from the ruined world,
With the flower of god and man
Upon our brow like the light of the sun,
And their glory in our hand.

THE SHIPS OF THE SINGERS



N no hill-circled drowsy bay
Their tranquil sails are furled.
Theirs is no calm and ordered day :
Around their course is whirled
The stress and fury of the spray . . .
But they sing the songs of the world !

The harbor lights are soft with peace,
The harbor waves are still.
Shall not the far-sea toiling cease
Beneath the harbor hill ?
Shall not the bondsmen find release
And the worn heart gain its will ?

Yea, when the reddening sun-ball slips
Out through the gates of air,
Then the moon on the hills is like trembling lips
On a pale beloved's hair,
Then the ships shall linger ; but the ships
Of the singers shall not be there.

For no hill-circled peaceful bay
May hold their pinions furled,
Nor sleep of night, nor spells of day.
Afar their barks are whirled
In doom of the unpitying spray . . .
—But they sing the songs of the world.

THE NEW ARGO



UNLIGHTED earth and warmth of pleasant places
Set on green slopes touched with the lips of Spring ;
Clinging of hands and pleading of sweet faces ;
Memories of song dear voices used to sing :—

These fold us round with all-too-soft entreating
To win us back among the happy days
That spread about us till one dream came fleeting
To lead us forth into untrodden ways.

They fold us round, and yet they cannot stay us,
For we are bound to lands beyond the stars.
Nor circumstance nor pleasure shall delay us,
Nor duty hold us with its stubborn bars.
Where we are going duty fades, and pleasure ;
Our course is set into strange lighted skies
Above hope high, and holy beyond measure,
Whose flaming beauty slays,—or glorifies !

The sail is filling ! Past the well-known beaches,
Out through the rocks and over the blue flow
We turn toward unknown lands and barren reaches
Of sea and sky where demon tempests blow.
We turn, with hearts made firm to face the billow,
To sail beyond the sunset's farthest gleams,
Till in the end the stars shall be our pillow
And our last sleep shall thrill with deathless dreams.

THE DEATH OF SHELLEY

“Now let us together solve the great Mystery.”—SHELLEY.

(SCENE—The deck of a small sailing vessel. Shelley and Williams sit near the bow, too far off for the sailor to hear what Shelley is reading from a manuscript which he holds.)

SHELLEY (*reading*)—I have not seen thee on a granary floor
With wind-blown tresses mid the garnered sheaves.
And yet I think my heart is with thee more
Than his, who, singing thee, but half believes.
I have drawn near to thee, who art so far,
When golden-rod in faded pomp is spread,
And when through dusk come rising star by star
Orion and Aldebaran the Red.

For I was born when Autumn's solemn spirit
Held the earth rapt with magics like to these.
And as my sacred birthright I inherit
Aldebaran and the wingèd Pleiades,
The flood of hazy sun, the wide chill night,
The dusk where Ceres searched for Proserpine ;
And all her woven legends of delight
Are in my blood-beats, that I know them mine !

And have I not drawn closer through the years
To thee who wast the mother of my birth ?
Are thy lone mists unlike my dimming tears,
Or my sad heart unlike thy sedgy earth ?
Ah, even in thy splendours am I thine ;
For I, too, long to lift the heart that grieves
Aloft in flame that on the hills may shine,
And sink to rest in silence of dim leaves.

(He is silent for a time, looking out over the water).

Oh that the brain could rest a little while,—
That the swift mind could stop its mazy loom
Only a little ; and lay aside, one hour,
The threads of amethyst and olive and silver.
—Have you not felt sometimes you would go mad
Unless the weaving stopped ?—

WILLIAMS—

Never quite that.

My brain is not so eager, so swift as yours,
Which flames like a fire, and flashes into beauty.

SHELLEY—I think it is a curse ; I know it is.

Hear this :—for three nights it has never ceased.
The brain works on when I am stretched in sleep
Of utter weariness of the body ; still
The phantoms of my thought find no repose
By shore of any slow Lethean flood,
But stir, leaping forever in wild flame.
It almost frightens me, this quenchless fire ;
And if the shapes turned grim, not beautiful,
Madness would lie not very far away.
Three nights ago mine own figure met me

Upon the terrace, and whispered hauntingly,
“How long wilt thou be content?” . . . I am not
content . . .

WILLIAMS—Perhaps I am too sane, as you have told me
Many a time. But you,—you find too dear
Those gloomy brinks that just divide the soul
From its own chaos. Come, come, cease to read
Or twine your thought around Medusa-heads.
Let us for one day be but simple men,—
Fishermen, like this honest rascal here.

SHELLEY—(*laughing*)—Well, be an honest fisherman if you can
But here, I give you test.—What odour comes
Unto your nostrils now?

WILLIAMS— I noticed it
A half-hour since, and knew not how to name it.
It seems some perfume from an ocean garden,
So faint, so sweet it is not of the sense.

SHELLEY—(*eagerly*)—Yea, that is it.—A breath from far away
Out of the secret bourns of sea and wind :—
The West Wind and the Sea Wind twined in one,
And the keen rapture of their swooned embrace
Is borne to us, and makes us quiver and thrill
Like far-off music touching a still lyre. . . .
—Ah friend, friend, you a fisherman! Now hear
Your honest counterpart.—What is that breath
Of perfume that comes down the waiting air?

SAILOR—That salty smell?—I think it is the spray
Dashing around us—or the wind from the sea.

WILLIAMS—Perhaps it calls a storm?

SAILOR—

Pray heaven not.

I left the nets all spread upon the beach,
And if a storm comes, they will be washed off
Or torn by the rocks.

SHELLEY—

How prosper you this year ?

SAILOR—Oh, well enough. But it is a hard trade ;

And fish bring not the prices they did once.

SHELLEY—How many fish do you get in a day's work ?

WILLIAMS—Nay, Shelley, try not to find out the secrets

Of this man's trade.—I know you long to follow it !

SHELLEY—Oh, mock not. For their lives are not so happy.

Their unrest must come too, and they have not

Even the little light that bides in ours.

I cannot think of them as more than a dream,—

Blind weary shadows groping in a dusk

Of terrible caverns and Cyclopean rocks.—

Shadows that scarcely know themselves alive,

That strain, and grope, and slumber—and are gone.

WILLIAMS—Yet they have hours of peace that you have not.

They drink a merry wine-cup in the sun,

And rest from toil and know a depth of quiet

That never can come near you.

SHELLEY—

Ah, what worth

Lies in this ease, save as the ease of cattle

Within whose brain a dying ember smoulders ?

SAILOR—Sir, there is a wind rising, and those clouds

Droop lower. If it pleased you, it were well

To turn toward land and wait upon their passing.

SHELLEY—Turn, if you think it best ; I care not.—Friend,

What is their life worth if it see no gleam
Of what we call reality?—If the flush
Of something more than actual daily round
Of earth's existence flicker not in their souls?

WILLIAMS—God knows.—And yet, even we who feel the leap,
The splendid agony of the mounting flame,—
What have we won? What are our lives but wind
That seeks oases in an empty waste?

SHELLEY—(*abstractedly*)—Yea, seekers; and we know not
what we seek;—

Unless it be to mingle our faint flames
With some more bright effulgence. But the dark
Is as a prison round each lonely fire.
Ah, sometimes I would give the whole of life
To touch, to mingle with another soul. . . .

(*Both are silent for a time*).

WILLIAMS—See, how the wind grows fresher, and the spray
Leaps up in front of us like fountain-drops.

SHELLEY—They leap as in an ecstasy of fear,
Lashed by the mighty impulse of the wind.—
Even as we quiver and palpitate and start
When over us the wind of thought moves strong,
Until our spirits become the spirit of it,
And we believe ourselves as free, as strong,
And dash us skyward into rending foam!

WILLIAMS—Aye, but why let it rack your thoughts so keenly?
Forget yourself a little; let your soul
Sleep from these stirrings of a self-wrought pain.
You do yourself an evil.—Think, rather,

Of all the beauty you have wrought, and all
You yet shall work,—things such as never man
Has wrought before, or shall on earth again.

(Shelley rises, and walks to the prow, where he stands feverishly aroused, and growing more and more impetuous throughout the following speech).

SHELLEY—I have wrought things no man has ever wrought.

I have dreamed out into the Infinite,—
Untrod, inviolate, holy ; and brought to earth
Gleams from that far-off world beyond the darkness.
Vain, vain ! I could not enter, only see
The meteor brightness plumed upon its gates,
And o'er its walls the arching blue of heaven.

There is my home ! How have I wandered thence ?
What woeful tide bore me to earth ?—Again
I fail and sicken with yearning for its light. . . .

Oh great West Wind, Oh Wind from out the seas,
Thou callest me as one like unto thee.
I have walked with thee in the flame-winged air,
And heard thy secret whispers, till I rose
Above thy flight, and knew myself undying,
And felt the pulses of the universe
Beat through my soul ; and the world sank away,
And I alone remained in the vast void,
A spirit of fire, an odour of creation,
A singing voice through all eternity.

Away, away, dim shadows clouding me !
Away dense earthy forms that block my sight ;
And let me know the intenser soul of life,—

The light beyond the sunset, and the music
With which the night is silent, and the beam
Shooting across the worlds from him who now
Communes with life.—O Keats, you yearn toward me
Out of the darkness. On the great West Wind,
Amid the far-world odours you are borne.
And the flame folds us and the shadows die
And life fulfils itself.—I come ! I come ! . . .
WILLIAMS—Good God ! Turn, turn the helm !
SAILOR— The waves ! The waves !

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